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ABSTRACT

External influences in the universal culture have significantly affected the image of Arab Americans and their children. Although Arab Americans are less visible than other minorities, the anti-Arab perception in the media makes them more visible in a negative way. Based on an ethnographic study investigating the experiences of Arabic-speaking students in U.S. schools, the findings and implications for teaching are presented in this paper. The paper outlines the ways that social conditioning has shaped the evolution of scapegoating, stereotyping and prejudice and how it has affected intercultural relations in U.S. public schools. It examines causes and effects of the "identity crisis" in terms of the negative impact cultural conditioning has on the self-image of the Arabic-speaking child. Finally, the paper focuses on fostering a more positive learning/teaching environment in culturally diverse classrooms, presenting implications for social studies teachers on how to invite mutual trust, develop empathy, reduce prejudice, and empower Arab minority children through the social harmonizing process. It attempts to provide a microsociological account of some important cultural information about Arabic speakers that, hopefully, will assist teachers with a point of departure from which to understand their students and their families. An appendix offers a Middle-Eastern awareness record test. (Contains 43 references.) (BT)

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Teaching About Arab Americans: What Social Studies Teachers Should Know

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Teaching About Arab Americans: What Social Studies Teachers Should Know

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Introduction and Context

With the increasing trends in social instability across the globe, the need to understand the implications of these events and how they affect minority children in the microcosm of today's classrooms is significant. In particular, external influences in the universal culture have significantly affected the image of Arab Americans and their children.

The unstable Middle East has caused many people living in this region of the world to seek refuge and stability elsewhere. Great numbers of immigrants and refugees throughout the Middle East have joined an already large and vibrant Arabic-speaking community in the United States of America.

Although Arab Americans are less visible than other minorities, the anti-Arab perception in the media makes them more visible in a negative way. Current cultural conditioning does not allow Arabs in America to see themselves positively because of the way Americans see them. At the same time, it does it allow Americans to see Arabs the way Arabs truly see themselves. Based on an ethnographic study investigating the experiences of Arabic speaking students in American schools, the findings and their implications for teaching are presented. This article also presents observations on the ways in which social conditioning has shaped the evolution of scapegoating, stereotyping and prejudice, and how it has affected intercultural relations in American public schools. This paper examines causes and effects of the "identity crisis" in terms of the negative impact cultural conditioning has on the self-image of the Arabic speaking child.

Finally, the discussion focuses on fostering a more positive learning/teaching environment in culturally diverse classrooms. Implications for social studies teachers on how to invite mutual trust, develop empathy, reduce prejudice, and empower Arab minority children through the social harmonizing process are presented.

Background Information About Arabs

The sizable portion of Arabic speaking students in American educational institutions requires educators to learn more about this group. Educators must create an environment

conducive to the academic, social, psychological, linguistic, and cultural growth of these participants in our democratic educational system. Fallacious assumptions caused by cultural conditioning about Arabic speaking students will impede their success and prevent active participation in our multicultural society. Conditions of effective learning must be present to enhance motivation, promote tolerance, reduce prejudice, and multiply learning opportunities for all students. The understanding of the invisible Arab children is a key element in promoting positive self-esteem and achieving desired educational outcomes.

To better understand Arab minority children, teachers should have a minimum knowledge about the background of the their students (Adeeb& Smith, 1995; Al-Ani, 1995; Al-Batal, 1988; Elkholy, 1976; Khouri, 1990; Nieto, 1996; Peretz, 1981; Sawaie & Fishman, 1985; Storti, 1989; Stover,1983; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983). Thus, it is worthwhile first to present some background information about Arab populations that might help teachers become more sensitive to the unique needs of students form Arab backgrounds (see Appendix A for a self-test).

Accurate information about Arabs is scarce, and when found, it is replete with bias and stereotypes. Also, available information about Arabs does not largely reflect their diverse sociocultural differences. These along with other factors may mislead the public about Arabs, what contributions they have made to humanity, and what interactions they have with their fellow humans. Although the following information about Arabs and their cultures is not conclusive, it may help teachers understand some of the issues in different educational settings.

* There are about 200 million Arabs living in 22 Arab countries (in southwestern Asia and North Africa) extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf.
* The Arab territories are heterogeneous in climate, resources, and demographics.
* Arabs belong to the Semitic race which originally lived in the Arabian Peninsula.
* There are inaccurate definitions of who an Arab is. Not all Arabs are Muslims; there are Arab Christians and Jews (about 20% of the Muslims are Arabs, and about 5% of the Arabs are Christians). Furthermore, Turks and Iranians, although mostly Muslims, are not Arabs.
* Not everyone living in the Arab World is an Arab; there are other ethnic and racial groups such as Kurds, Druze, Copts, Assyrians, Armenians, Blacks, Berbers, Kildanis.

* The Arab World encompasses an array of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious groups. The Arab macroculture is pluralistic in nature and is increasingly multicultural.
* The Arab microcultures flourished within a seemingly democratic framework. Historically, the macroculture of the Arab World was marked by a dynamic balance between unity and pluralism during which time the microcultures flourished in an ambiance of harmony and coexistence.
* The Arab value system centers around the family. Arabs are family-oriented where children are highly valued with a great sense of pride in individuals, families, communities, and society at large.
* Religion and language are among the most important identifying traits of individuals and communities among Arabs. Islam, intricately related to Judaism and Christianity, is seen as a way of life, a means of cultural and social growth, a political and economic paradigm of behavior at individual and group levels.
* The Arabic language, once a lingua franca, has a religious prestige because it is the language God chose to reveal the Quran (Kura'an) to Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Quranic (Classical, or High) Arabic is the language of the mosque, media, and education. It is the language that is supposed to be used by the elite educated Arabs.
* Arabic speaking peoples are *dilingual* due to the diglossic situation in Arabic; two functional forms of the language are equally important in meeting the communicative needs of their speakers.
* Quranic literacy is widely common among hundreds of millions non-Arab Muslims across the globe. About one billion Muslims know Arabic.
* Arab Muslim civilizations flourished throughout history; their empire spread from Spain and Europe to China. Arabs have contributed to world civilizations in nearly all aspects.
* Foreign/second language learning is highly valued by Arabs and Muslims. Multilingualism is viewed as a social and religious asset, not a liability.
* Arab and Muslim Americans are among the largest ethnic groups in the United States.

According to Banks (1994), one of the most fundamental dimensions of education in pluralistic social and educational institutions is the knowledge construction process. It relates to "the extent to which teachers help students to understand, investigate and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and biases within a discipline

influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it" (p. 5). This dimension is also important because it intricately relates to other dimensions such as reducing prejudice, empowering the school culture and social structure, equity pedagogy, and content integration. A dynamic balance between these dimensions is necessary to empower all students from diverse, racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, understanding students' characteristics, feelings, attitudes, and experiences can help teachers and educators develop more democratic values and attitudes and become more active participants in the pluralistic society (Banks, 1995; Bennett, 1995; Grant, 1995; Nieto, 1996).

The Arab diversity stems from geographic, ethnic, religious, political and socio-economic factors that are found throughout the Arab World. It is diverse in nature despite the common cultural and linguistic traits that are found in various Arab societies. Arab populations represent diverse backgrounds. In fact, Arabic-speaking populations in American public schools represent a variety of sociocultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and their educational expectations and attitudes reflect these numerous differences (Yorkey, 1977).

While some Arab communities have assimilated to the American way of life, others have tried to maintain a meaningful level of multiculturalism (Grant, 1995). Still, others have developed resentment to the sociocultural adjustment process due to the alienation and sense on non-belonging in the American society (Bennett, 1995; Grant, 1995; Suleiman, 1996c). In other words, most Arab Americans feel that they are deprived of their full participation in the democratic process (Nieto, 1996; Suleiman, 1996a).

Although there are many factors that shape the Arab American experience which influence the educational needs of their children, Arab American children have become invisible in the American educational system.

Arab Americans: The Invisible Minority

Although the history of Arab emigrations to America is an old one, these waves have been hardly noticeable. The contemporary state of the Arab countries has been brought about in the wake of the colonization era that led to divisions in political entities. As a result of the Western intervention, the gap between ethnic, religious and racial groups has widened (Goldfield, 1990). Hence, a non-stable Arab World has prompted several immigration waves to the Americas. For instance, the initial wave of Arabic-speaking immigrants came to the United States from Syria and Lebanon--the most troubled of all--in the early 1900's (Sawaie & Fishman, 1985). Another immigration wave, as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, began as early as the 1930's. Since then other migrations from places such as Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq took place as people sought greater professional and economic opportunities in America. Reasons that may have influenced Arabic-speaking people to come to the United

States may be dictated by political instability in their countries. These reasons involve finding an opportunity to get away from discrimination to which they are subjected by their government, and an opportunity to get away from social pressures (Rao, 1979).

Speaking of the immigration patterns and characteristics of the invisible Arab Americans, Nieto (1996) writes, ". . . Although many have indeed come under these circumstances in the recent past, their numbers have not been conspicuous. Consequently their immigration to this country has been a relatively quiet one, given scant attention by the media" (p.168). At the same time, Nieto acknowledges the astonishing lack of information about this particular group. In fact, literature that provides an objective and comprehensive account about the Arab Americans is almost unattainable.

However, Arabs have become dynamic in the social interaction process within the U.S. overarching democratic framework. Historically, they interacted with different cultures in a pluralistic manner. The diversity of Arab cultures, societies and languages, provides an ample testimony about their active participants in the global society. Thus, most Arabs-- given the pretext of their motivation to immigrate-- can easily adjust linguistically, socially, and psychologically. Overall, unlike many minority groups, Arab immigrants have made a "smooth transition" into the American society. Similarly, Arab children "have not faced massive failure in schools, as is true with other groups," so "they have not been the target of study or research as others have" (Nieto, 1996, p. 168).

It is worth mentioning that there are many reasons why Arab American children tend to be more successful in schools. First, most of these children come from "voluntary immigrant" families who originally came to the U.S. to obtain education. In fact, a large portion of Arab American immigrants came to obtain a degree, so their children are raised in educated family environments and that has contributed to their success in schools. Second, Arab families place a high value on education and see it as essential for their children's growth and success. Since parents see education as a catalyst for their children and their future (Elkholy, 1976), they always encourage them to get education for education's sake rather than only for utilitarian purposes.

Most importantly, Arabs do not share some of the traits that make other minorities more visible. Generally speaking, Arab Americans are less "racially visible" than other minorities as Asians or Blacks. Thus, they are "much more apt to 'blend in' with the European American population," while still maintaining distinctive cultural traits (Nieto, 1996, p. 168).

According to Schaefer (1990, pp. 7-8) there are five properties that distinguish minority or subordinate groups from dominant ones: visible physical or cultural characteristics, involuntary membership, in-group marriage, awareness of subordination,

unequal treatment, and experience of prejudice. While Arab Americans tend to be physically less identifiable, they share with other minorities involuntary membership, their consciousness of being subordinated, prejudiced and discriminated against. Although in-group marriage is the norm, Arabs have no restrictions that prohibit interracial marriage. This is especially true of many Arab American males who married outside their groups and whose children have assimilated into the American society.

The most striking trait of Arabs as an invisible group is their unequal treatment and their experiences of unique types of prejudice and discrimination. Ironically, these properties make them more visible in negative ways in the American society. In schools, while Arab American students have largely been successful, contemporary cultural conditioning and historical precedent of misinformation forewarn that we should expect them to be jeopardized in their social and academic growth in the multicultural society.

This will be discussed in terms of social and cultural conditioning which makes them powerless in the American society.

The Social and Cultural Conditioning: A Campaign of Errorism

There are many factors that contribute to cultural conditioning which affect images about minorities. These include social patterns inherent in behaviors of individuals, groups, and institutions. Sharpe (1992) discusses the impact of cultural conditioning on human and public relations in the American democracy. He maintains that several American institutions such as mass media have promoted, for a long time, an individualistic culture. In order to overcome negative disadvantages of cultural conditioning, Sharpe (1992) suggests that the "best advancement is to learn all we can about other cultures and impart it to our students and fellow practitioners. It allows us to more clearly see ourselves as others see us" (p.107). Hence, we need to make accurate educated assessments about the behavior of individuals, groups , and institutions to "facilitate change that truly contributes to the social harmonizing process for the benefit of the global society" (Sharpe, 1992, p.107).

Undoubtedly, negative perceptions and attitudes are the outcome of personal experiences of individuals, parental influences, social ingredients, and mass media, all of which help to shape attitudes of individuals and groups (Gardner, 1982, 1988, 1991; Oskamp, 1977; Reynolds, 1991). In particular, the media plays a significant role in enhancing stereotypes especially about Arabs. According to Anderson, "In the United States, anti-Arab propaganda is a hot commercial item . . . and the media have done their part to encourage Arab-bashing" (p. 29). This over the years has made Arabs more visible in a reprehensible manner. Negative images about Arabs have been incubated in the minds of the public and carried into today's classrooms. So whenever external incidents take place, Arabs seem to be

most vulnerable to blame. Abourezk (1993) demonstrated how Arab-Americans and their children lose their civil rights due to the social climate in the American society; according to him, "Arabs are America's new scapegoats, and anti-Arab hysteria has been building in this country for many years" (p. 26). Abourezk cited several incidents that reflect the behavior of agents of the American governmental and social institutions in their intimidation of Americans of Arab descent.

For a long time Arabs have been plunged into the realm of stereotyping and victimization (Adeeb & Smith, 1995; Al-Ani, 1995; Nieto, 1996; Santos & Suleiman, 1991; Suleiman, 1993; Suleiman 1996a,b,c; Zogby, 1981). This has resulted in misinformation about the merits of the Arabic culture and its contributions to humanity instead of acknowledging it as a vital part of American pluralism. Thus, cultural conditioning marked with a great deal of *errorism* about Arab societies has negatively affected the images of Arabic speaking children as seen by their peers and the images of themselves. Consequently, the Arab American child, according to Nieto (1996), is "one of the most misunderstood, shrouded in mystery and consequently stereotypes" (p.137). Part of the problem is the scarcity of accurate information and unbiased resources about Arabs. Another reason lies in the lack of a true representation in the media that gives fair credit to Arabs and their cultures.

In addition, the role of schools in the American educational system has been ineffective in reducing stereotypical images about Arabs. Learners whose cultures are not acknowledged in schools feel alienated. Furthermore students feel that whatever the school does not teach is not worth learning. Since the Arab culture in American public schools is "referred to in only negative ways" (Nieto 1996, p. 137), "all students are miseducated to the extent that they receive only a partial and biased education. The primary victims of biased education are those who are invisible in the curriculum" (p. 213). Thus, if contributions of a given group are not highlighted in the school curriculum, students will receive conflicting messages about who they are and what their roles should be. And if a group of learners are portrayed negatively in the school's culture, then an "identity crisis" will be inevitable. These meanings have been echoed in the experiences of many Arabic speaking students going to American educational institutions including the university level (Suleiman, 1993).

Therefore, foundation and methodology in a multiculturally infused program should address "information on the contributions of diverse people to the various disciplines" (Chisholm, 1994, pp. 57-58). Unfortunately, the Arab civilization, which has greatly contributed to humanity in almost every aspect of world civilization (Al-Qazzaz et al, 1978), has largely been ignored by American educational institutions and their educational programs. In an account of the lack of serious efforts to acknowledge and "celebrate" the Arabic language and culture in U.S. public schools, colleges, and universities, Starr (1991)

demonstrates how America failed to be sensitive to the Arab language and culture in these educational institutions; he also reveals its (i.e. America's) "provincial" trend in dealing with other cultures and languages. Although, "Arabic is the language of one of the world's great civilizations, and one to which the West has been profoundly indebted for over a millennium in fields as diverse as mathematics, chemistry, geography, and philosophy" (Starr, 1991, p. B2), no profound commitment to multiculturalism in the curriculum has been made.

Despite the interaction Arabs have with Americans, it has been found that indirect contact with Americans has little impact on promoting stereotypes (Kamal & Maruyama, 1990). At the same time, more direct contacts between Americans and Arabs will likely lead to developing mutual positive attitudes (Suleiman, 1993; Suleiman, 1996c,d). In fact, the most frequent contact Americans have with Arabs and their countries is through media channels. This clearly reflects the role of the media in the cultural and social conditioning process.

Arabic speaking students have had their share of discrimination due to cultural conditioning. Numerous reports document cases of Arab American students at different levels being harassed by their peers in times of political fluctuations. While the American public has become conditioned to accept negative stereotypes, educators can play a significant role in the social harmonization process in the school culture and in society at large. In particular, bilingual/multicultural teachers have the power to thwart cultural conditioning from taking its toll. After all, students are the ultimate consumers of teachers' input and overall educational services provided by the school system. Cultivating a more positive cultural conditioning is a key ingredient for providing the best education for all, and empowering individuals and groups regardless of their backgrounds.

Finally, educators dealing with Arabic speaking students need to be sensitive to their unique needs. Teachers in social studies classrooms must communicate with students and their families and suspend hasty assumptions about their linguistic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. They also need to give credence to Arab cultures in the school's social studies curriculum in order to enhance students' pride and ensure their success.

Implications for Social Studies Teachers

One of the most important determiners of effective teaching of Arabic speaking populations is maintaining a positive attitude about Arabs and their culture. In addition to understanding how Arab Americans are viewed, it is important to understand Arabs' perceptions of Americans.

Affective characteristics of minority learners, such as attitudes toward the dominant group, have a marked effect on learning/teaching and interactional processes in diverse

settings (Lustig & Koester, 1996; Seelye, 1993) . For instance, affective predispositions (i.e. the learner's beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards the target language community are likely to explain a proportion of language achievement (Olshtain, Shohamy, Kemp, & Chatow, 1990). These affective variables deal with social/political contexts from which attitudes and motivation are derived (Gardner, 1982).

Attitude formation, according to Brown (1987), develops in the early stages of one's life and is the result of parents' and peers' attitudes. It is also the result of "contact with people who are 'different' in any number of ways, and interacting affective factors in the human experience" (p. 126). For instance, students whose experiences are unpleasant with English or its speakers tend to have unfavorable attitudes towards the host country and its language (DuBois, 1956). This is true of Arab minority groups who develop certain types of attitudes, negative or positive, towards Americans given several intervening factors.

Although these issues have been largely overlooked by researchers who have worked with Arabic-speaking populations, it has been found that Arab attitudes toward Americans and the U.S. are shaped in terms of various determiners (Suleiman, 1993). There are several factors that shape cross-cultural attitudes in this regard: (1) the individual's previous and current perceptions about the target group; (2) individual's experiences with the group in the host country; and (3) the media and its roles in enhancing positive and negative stereotypes. In a large scale study conducted on Arab university students, Suleiman (1993) concludes that Arab attitudes vary in terms of these determiners. For instance, the erroneous portrayal of Arabs in the American media negatively affects attitudes of Arabs towards Americans. Likewise, Arabs who have several unpleasant experiences with Americans tend to have unfavorable attitudes toward Americans.

In order to ease cultivate more positive attitudes in American social and educational institutions schools, several guidelines must be kept in mind. These guidelines should be implemented whether in the delivery of input or in the interactional process in various social and educational settings. Teachers and school administrators should be held accountable to create conditions that are conducive to the expectations of Arabic speaking children and their parents. These desired goals can be achieved through:

1. Awareness combined with mutual understanding and appreciation of cultural differences;
2. Frequent direct contact with the target group would always make oneself understood and comfortable, not to mention the improvement of one's command of the language;

3. Teaching/learning approaches should NOT be disconnected from teaching cultural and linguistic representing a given group;
4. Social studies programs should enhance the notion of intercultural communication as a requisite for development;
5. Social studies programs ought to be based on the needs assessment of students;
6. Teachers and educators dealing with Arab students should be sensitive to their needs and characteristics.

Conclusion

Given the alarming cultural conditioning which fosters negative stereotypes about Arab cultures and peoples, teachers in multicultural settings should maintain a positive outlook and a meaningful interaction with Arabic speaking students in American schools. By understanding the microcultures of this particular groups, teachers will promote a greater understanding of the dynamics of effective interaction in diverse classrooms. This will enhance their ability to deal with real-life issues and maintain peace in pluralistic schools.

This paper has attempted to provide a microsociological account of some important cultural information about Arabic-speakers which, hopefully, will assist teachers to have a point of departure from which to understand their students and their families. By providing relevant cultural information, teachers can better integrate multiculturalism in the curriculum, and engage students in every aspect of school's life. Similarly, positive cross-cultural attitudes can help Arabic speaking students' process of multiculturation in the pluralistic society.

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Appendix A

Suleiman's Middle-Eastern Awareness Record Test

(SMART)

1. Arabs live only in the Arab countries.	True	False	Unsure
2. The Arab countries are only located in Asia.	True	False	Unsure
3. Only Arabs live in the Arab countries.	True	False	Unsure
4. Most of the Arab world is desert in geography.	True	False	Unsure
5. The Arab countries have homogeneous climate.	True	False	Unsure
6. The resources in the Arab countries are limited to oil.	True	False	Unsure
7. The Arab society is homogeneous demographically.	True	False	Unsure
8. Arabs are of Semitic origin.	True	False	Unsure
9. All Arabs speak the same language.	True	False	Unsure
10. Arabic has only one dialect.	True	False	Unsure
11. All Arabs are Muslims.	True	False	Unsure
12. There are no Christian Arabs.	True	False	Unsure
13. There are no Jewish Arabs.	True	False	Unsure
14. Turks and Iranians are generally Arabs.	True	False	Unsure
15. There are no ethnic and racial minorities in the Arab world.	True	False	Unsure
16. Arab civilization has always been isolated from the world.	True	False	Unsure
17. Arabs in America were brought during the slave trade.	True	False	Unsure
18. Arabs in America share the same culture and beliefs.	True	False	Unsure
19. Arab American minorities generally hold menial jobs.	True	False	Unsure
20. Arab Americans always have physical features.	True	False	Unsure
21. Arabs have always been subject to discrimination.	True	False	Unsure
22. Arab women have always been deprived of full rights.	True	False	Unsure
23. Arab women have always had a secondary role in life.	True	False	Unsure
24. Arab contributions is always seen all the world over.	True	False	Unsure
25. Arabs have contributed little to the American civilization.	True	False	Unsure